



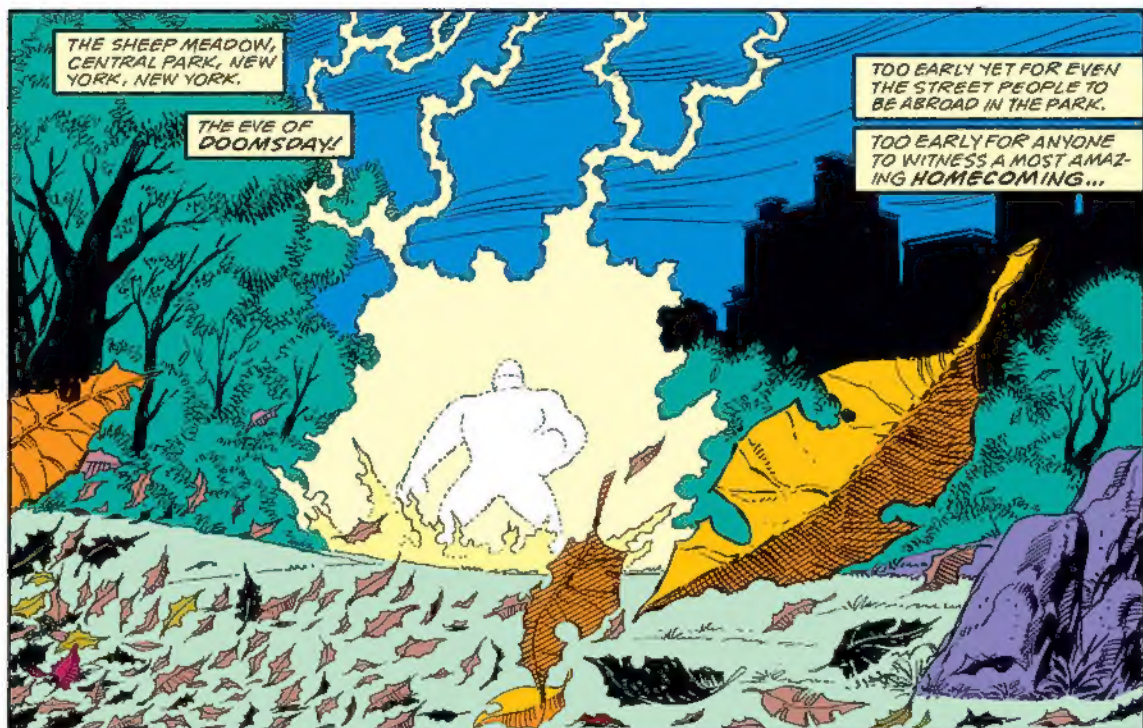
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THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!

Fantastic Four





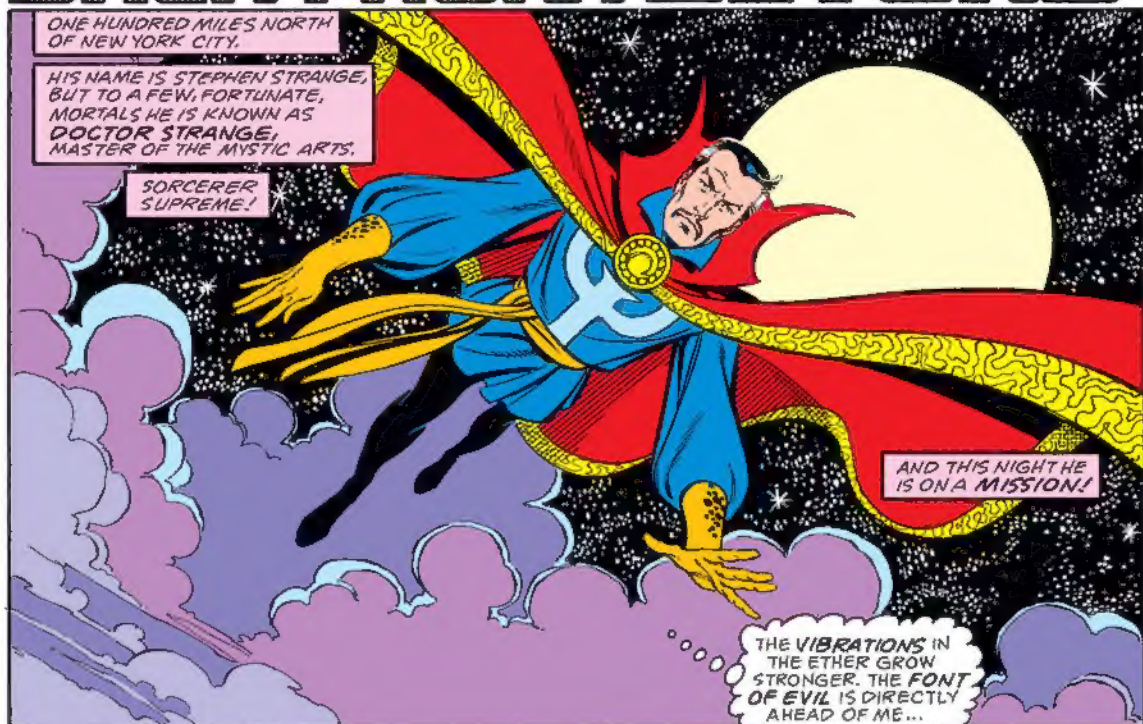
THE SHEEP MEADOW,
CENTRAL PARK, NEW
YORK, NEW YORK.

THE EVE OF
DOOMSDAY!

TOO EARLY YET FOR EVEN
THE STREET PEOPLE TO
BE ABROAD IN THE PARK.

TOO EARLY FOR ANYONE
TO WITNESS A MOST AMAZ-
ING HOMECOMING...

BACK FROM BEYOND



ONE HUNDRED MILES NORTH
OF NEW YORK CITY.

HIS NAME IS STEPHEN STRANGE,
BUT TO A FEW, FORTUNATE,
MORTALS HE IS KNOWN AS
DOCTOR STRANGE,
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS.

SORCERER
SUPREME!

AND THIS NIGHT HE
IS ON A MISSION!

THE VIBRATIONS IN
THE ETHER GROW
STRONGER. THE FONT
OF EVIL IS DIRECTLY
AHEAD OF ME...



I'M BACK!

SEEMS ALMOST
HARD TA BELIEVE, DON'T
IT? HALF A HEARTBEAT AGO
I WUZ OFF ON SOME WACK-O
ALIEN PLANET ON TH' OTHER
SIDE OF TH' UNIVERSE...*

...NOW JUST TH'
PUSH OF A BUTTON
AN' I'M BREATHIN'
NEW YORK AIR
AGAIN.

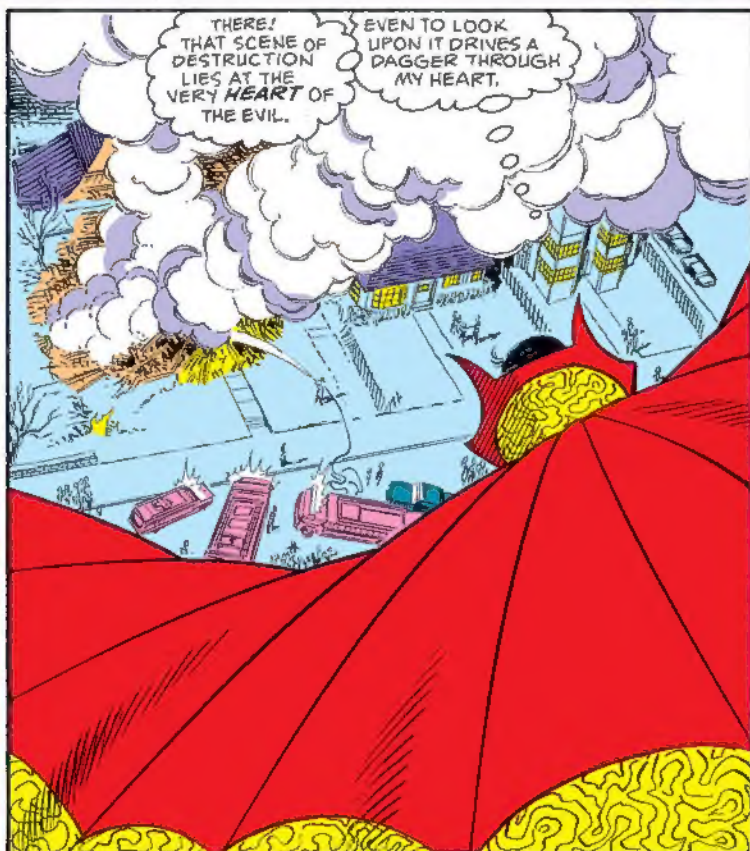
I OUGHTA
FEEL GLAD,
BUT I DON'T.

*SEE THE THING #22.



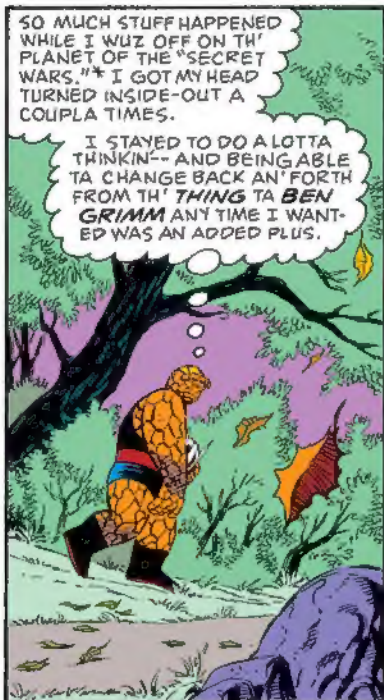
MAY THE VISHANTI GRANT
THAT I AM ABLE TO DISPEL
THE EVIL THAT HAS LOOSED
ITSELF UPON THE EARTH
THIS NIGHT.

THE MANIFESTATION WAS SO
POWERFUL--ENOUGH TO STRIKE
AT MY VERY SOUL AS A PHYSICAL
AGONY--THAT I FEAR I SHALL
NEED ALL MY SKILLS TO STOP IT.



THERE!
THAT SCENE OF
DESTRUCTION
LIES AT THE
VERY HEART OF
THE EVIL.

EVEN TO LOOK
UPON IT DRIVES A
DAGGER THROUGH
MY HEART.



SO MUCH STUFF HAPPENED WHILE I WUZ OFF ON TH' PLANET OF THE "SECRET WARS."* I GOT MY HEAD TURNED INSIDE-OUT A COUPLA TIMES.

I STAYED TO DO A LOTTA THINKIN'-- AND BEING ABLE TA CHANGE BACK AN' FORTH FROM TH' THING TA BEN GRIMM ANY TIME I WANTED WAS AN ADDED PLUS.



REED TOLD ME I COULD ONLY DO THAT 'CAUSE O' SOMETHIN' IN TH' PLANET'S MAKE-UP. BUT NOW I KNOW THAT AIN'T REALLY THE WAY IT WORKED. EVEN THERE I GOT **STUCK** AS THE THING AGAIN.



FUNNY... I STAYED ON THAT PLANET TA SEE IF I COULD MAYBE GET STUFF STRAIGHTENED OUT IN MY MIND. BUT EVERYTHING IS AS SCREWED UP AS IT WUZ BEFORE.

GUESS I CAN ONLY GET BACK ON SOMETHIN' LIKE AN EVEN KEEL IF I START RIGHT IN SORTING OUT WHAT I'VE LEARNED ABOUT MYSELF...

AN' THE BEST WAY TA DO THAT IS BY STARTIN' WITH ALICIA...



NOW, LET MY **CLOAK OF LEVITATION** LOWER ME GENTLY TO THE GROUND, A DISCRETE DISTANCE FROM THE CROWD OF ONLOOKERS...



...AND LET US SEE WHAT I CAN LEARN OF THIS AFFAIR FROM THE LOCAL CONSTABULARY.

EXCUSE ME, OFFICER. I AM A DOCTOR. CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE?



HUH? THAT'S FUNNY-- FOR A SECOND THERE I COULDA SWORN I SAW...

WHO DID YOU SAY YOU ARE, SIR?

DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE. IS THERE ANYONE **HURTE** MAY I BE OF ASSISTANCE?

THUS, THE PENSIVE THING CROSSES A FEW BLOCKS WEST OF THE PARK, AND, AFTER A SHORT STROLL DOWN BROADWAY...

SEÑOR GRIMM! IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE LAST SAW YOU!

MORNIN', JORGÉ. STILL THE HARDEST WORKIN' APARTMENT MANAGER IN SOHO?

I TRY, SEÑOR. WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO BUZZ THE SEÑORITA MASTERS AND TELL HER YOU'RE...

NO. S'OKAY. I'D RATHER THIS WUZ A SURPRISE.

AND SO... SOME SURPRISE! ME AN' ALICIA'S BIN TIGHTER'N TIGHT FOR A WHOLE BUNCH A YEARS NOW. WE EVEN TALKED ABOUT MARRIAGE ONCE OR TWICE-- RIDICULOUS AS THAT'D BE FOR US.

NOW...

NOW, HOW CAN I TELL HER I'VE COME TO A DECISION ABOUT US? HOW CAN I TELL HER I'LL ALWAYS LOVE HER, BUT FROM NOW ON WE CAN'T BE NOTHIN' BUT... FRIENDS.

AFTER ALL TH' MONTHS SHE'S BIN WAITIN' FER ME WHILE I WUZ OFF PLAYIN' SPACE RANGER, THAT BIT A' NEWS IS GONNA BUST HER UP PRETTY BAD.

BUT IT'S BETTER THAN GOIN' ON LIVIN' A LIE...

ALICIA M

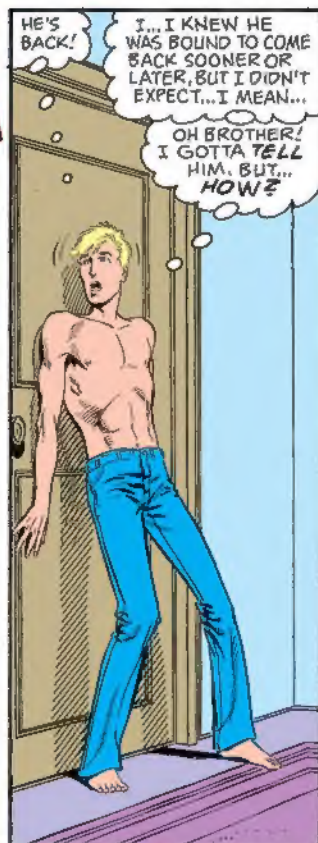
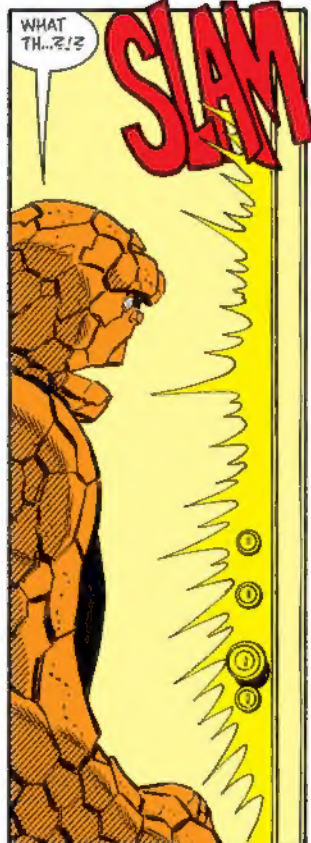
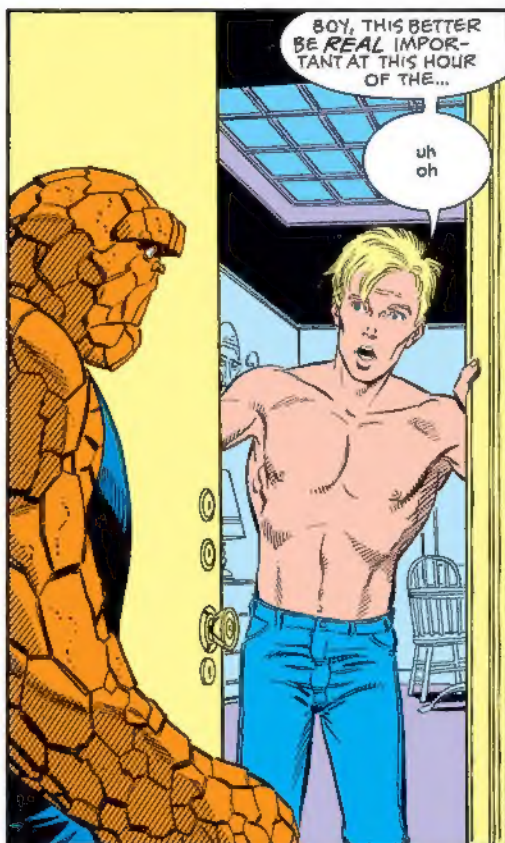
KNOCK KNOCK

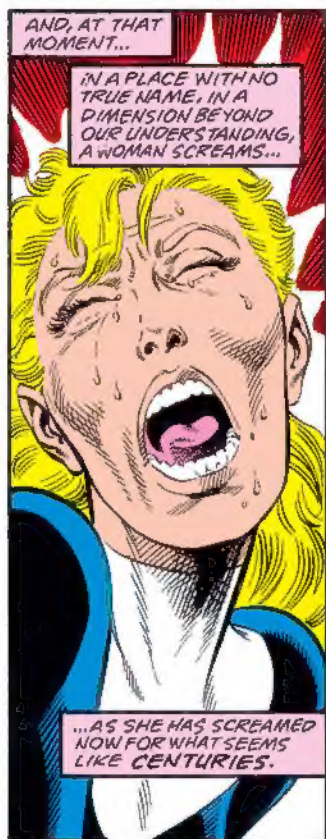
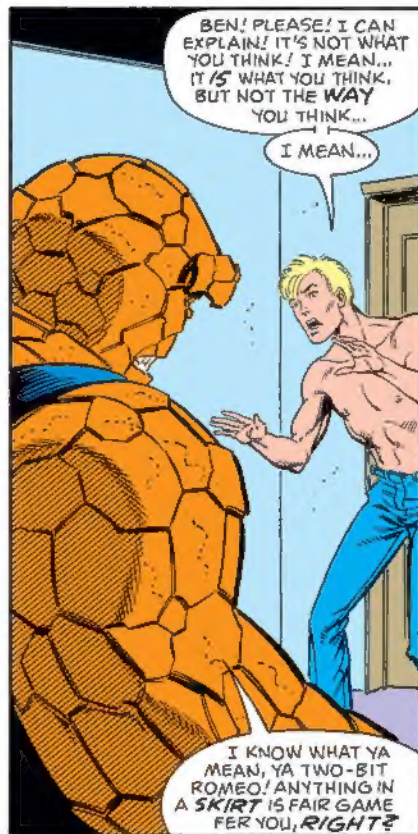
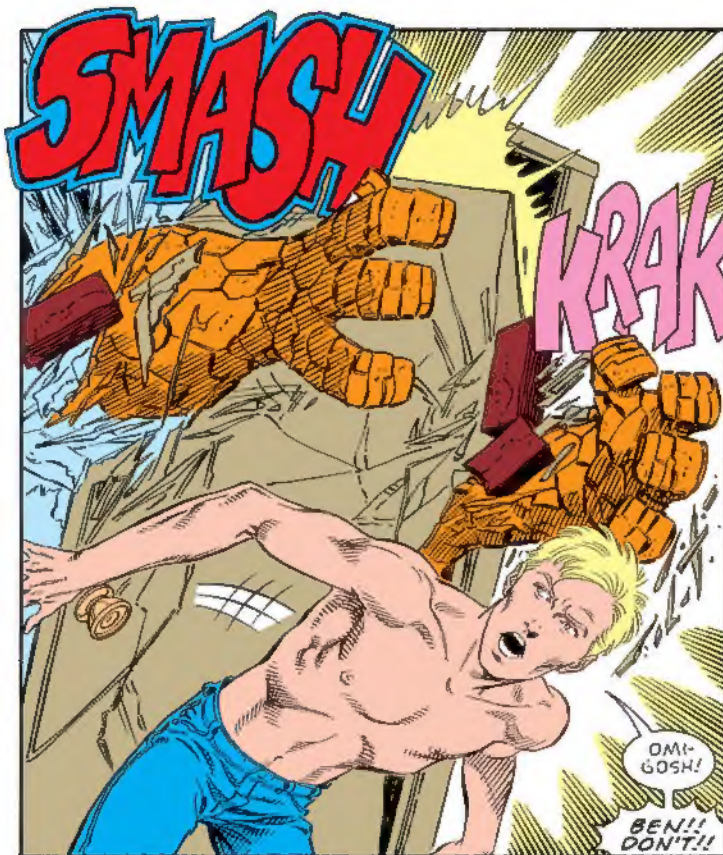
I'M AFRAID THESE FOLKS ARE BEYOND MEDICAL HELP, DOCTOR. TRAGIC, ISN'T IT? FOUR PEOPLE-- ONE OF 'EM JUST A LITTLE BOY-- SNUFFED OUT LIKE... LIKE... I DON'T KNOW WHAT.

AND THE NEIGHBORS SAY THEY'D JUST THIS EVENING HAD THEIR HOUSE-WARMING PARTY.

THEIR NAME WAS BENJAMIN.

BY THE HOARY HOSTS OF HOGGOTH! IT IS REED AND SUSAN RICHARDS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!!!



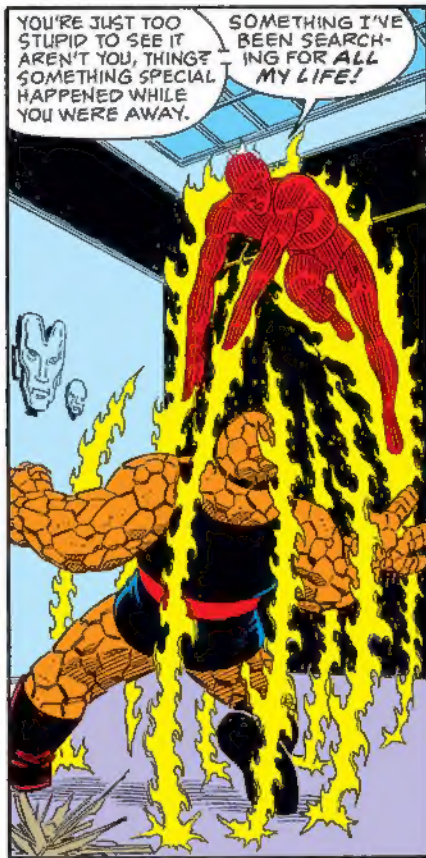




EVEN IF SHE BELONGS TO SOME-BODY ELSE!!

"BELONGS?" WHY, YOU OVER-BLOWN BAG OF MUSCLE...!!

FLAME ON!



YOU'RE JUST TOO STUPID TO SEE IT AREN'T YOU, THING? SOMETHING SPECIAL HAPPENED WHILE YOU WERE AWAY.

SOMETHING I'VE BEEN SEARCH-ING FOR ALL MY LIFE!



YOU WOULD SPEAK THUS TO MEPHISTO?



YOU WOUND ME TO THE QUICK, HUMAN. MEPHISTO IS NO MERE MONSTER. MEPHISTO IS MONARCH OF MONSTERS...

THE LIVING LORD OF EVIL!

SO YOU CLAIM, BUT ALL I SEE IS ANOTHER PETTY SUPER-BEING WHO USES HIS GREAT POWERS TO TORTURE AND KILL.

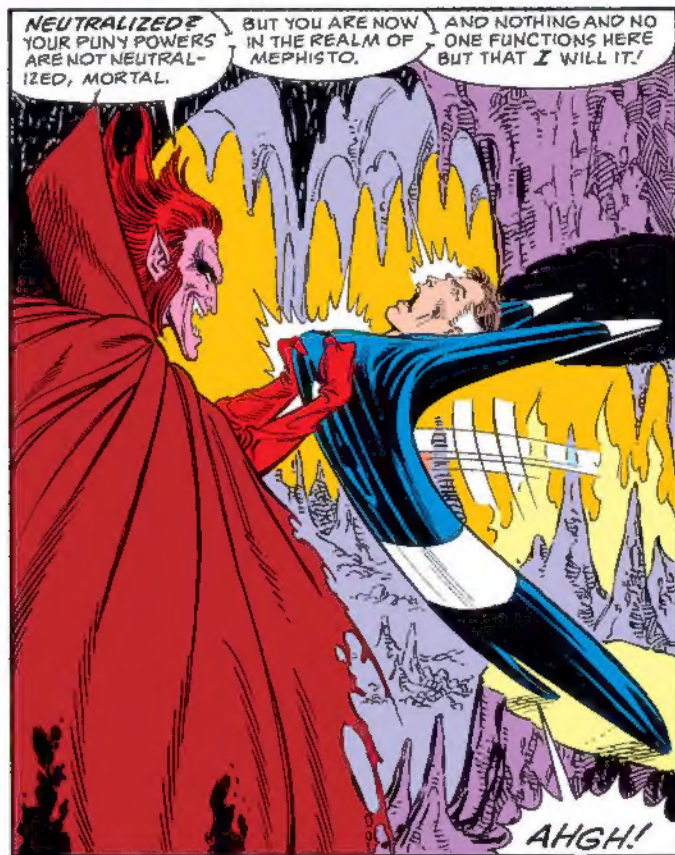
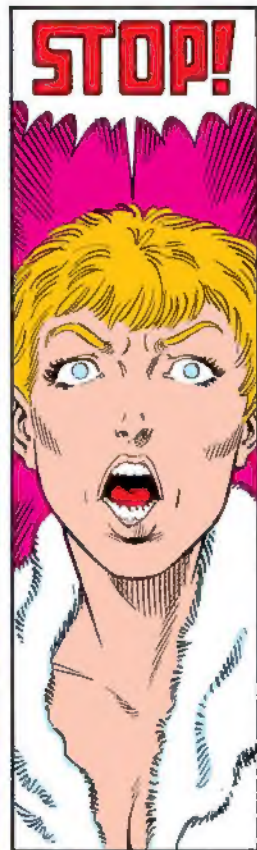
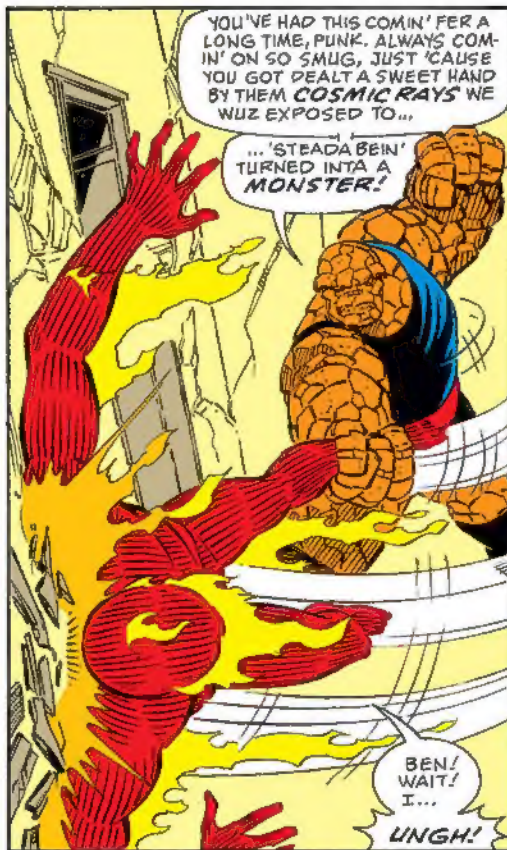


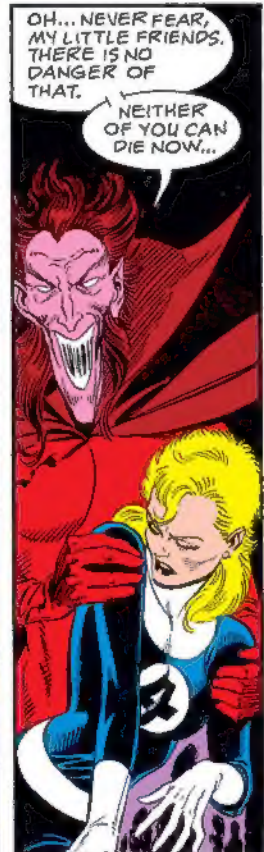
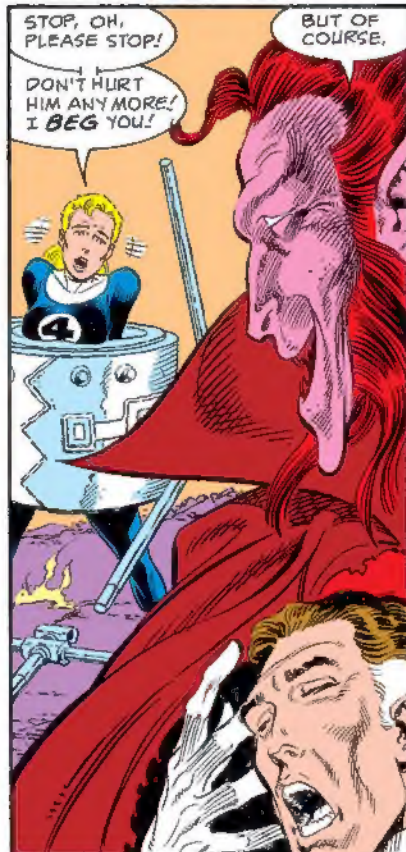
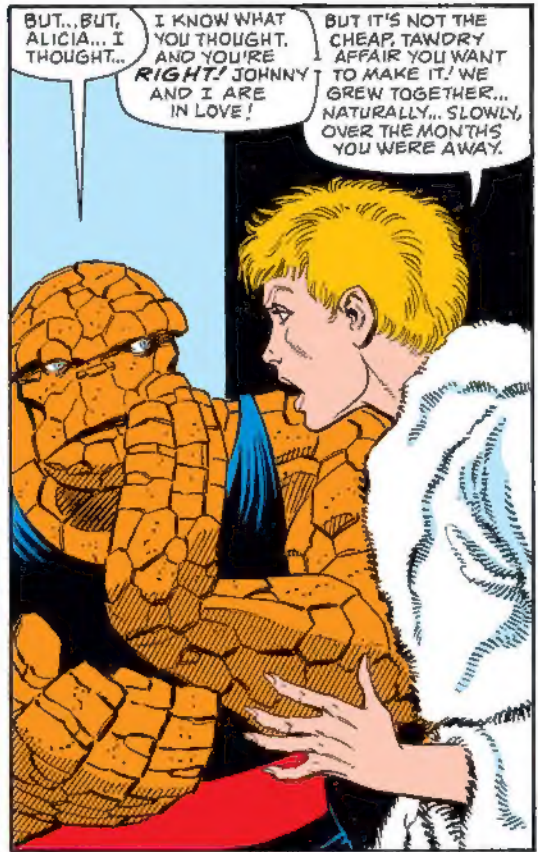
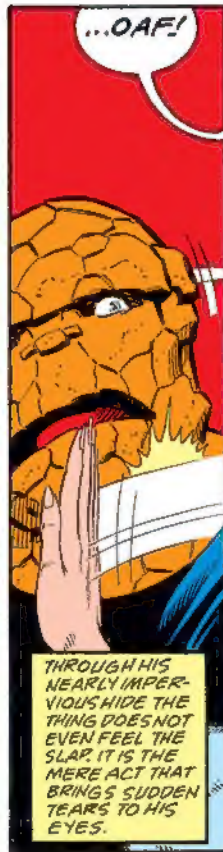
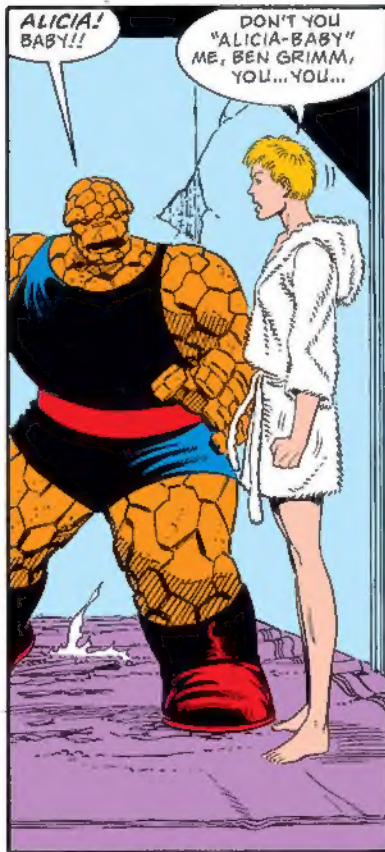
POOR, PATHETIC MORTAL, YOU STRIVE TO COMPREHEND MEPHISTO, AND IN SO DOING, YOU SEEK TO REDUCE HIM TO YOUR LEVEL.

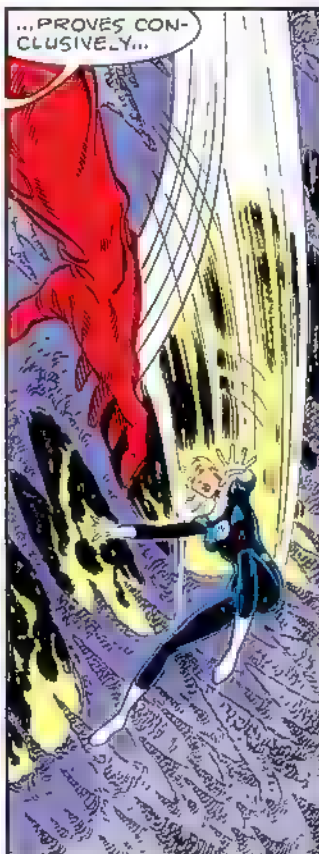
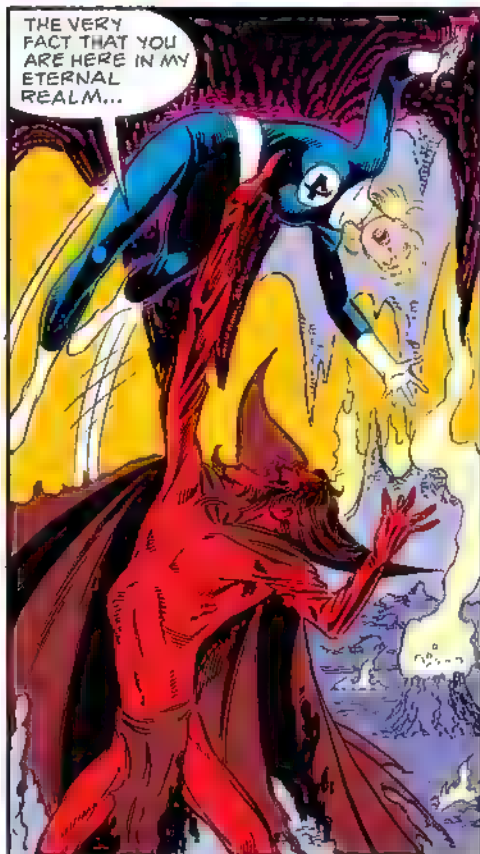
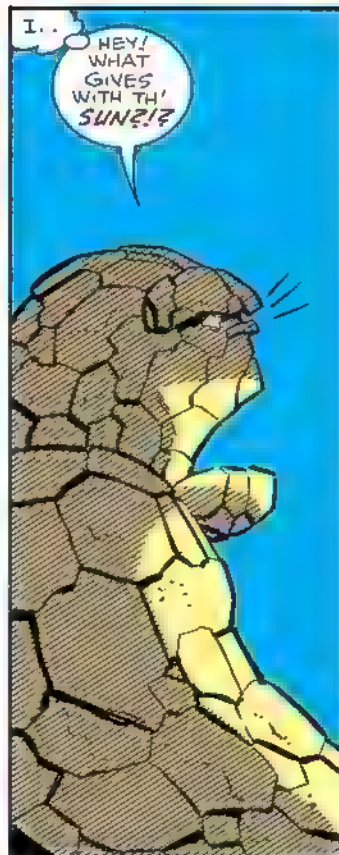
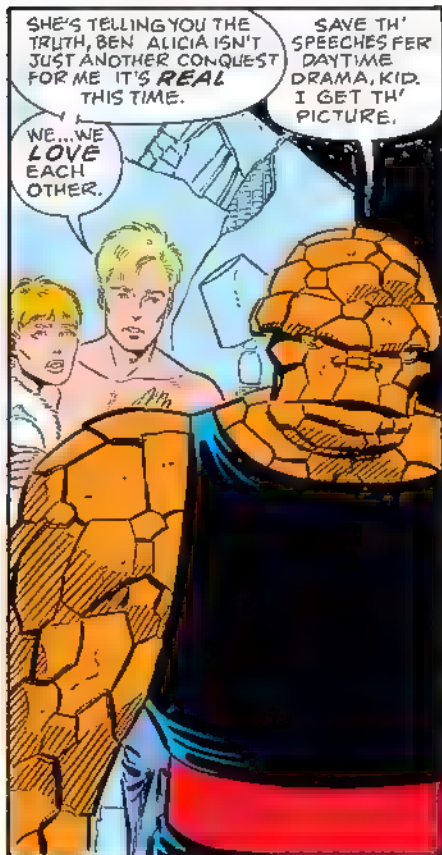
BUT MEPHISTO IS NOT TO BE THUS REDUCED, REED RICHARDS'. MEPHISTO IS OLDER THAN HUMANITY-- OLDER THAN TIME ITSELF!

MEPHISTO IS EVIL!

MORE BOASTING, MEPHISTO. MORE EMPTY WORDS, IF YOU HADN'T DISCOVERED SOME WAY TO NEUTRALIZE OUR POWERS, SUSAN AND I WOULD VERY QUICKLY CHANGE YOUR TUNE FOR YOU.







THE SUN.



FOR FOUR THOUSAND MILLION YEARS IT HAS SHED THE WARMTH OF ITS FIRES, THE GLOW OF ITS LIFE, OVER THE EARTH.



AND IN ALL THOSE YEARS IT HAS SEEMED, TO THE FLEETING LIVES OF THOSE WHO DWELL ON THAT TINY PLANET, TIMELESS AND UNCHANGING, PERFECT AND ABSOLUTE.



UNTIL TODAY...



YOU SEE? YOU SEE? THE SWEET RELEASE OF DEATH CAN NOT SAVE YOU HERE.

YOUR AGONIES SHALL BE ENDLESS AND INESCAPABLE!!



MEPHISTO RULES!

MEPHISTO IS THE LIVING FORCE OF EVIL, THE BLACK HEART THAT PUMPS ITS PUTRID BILE INTO THE FARTHEST CORNERS OF THE UNIVERSE!



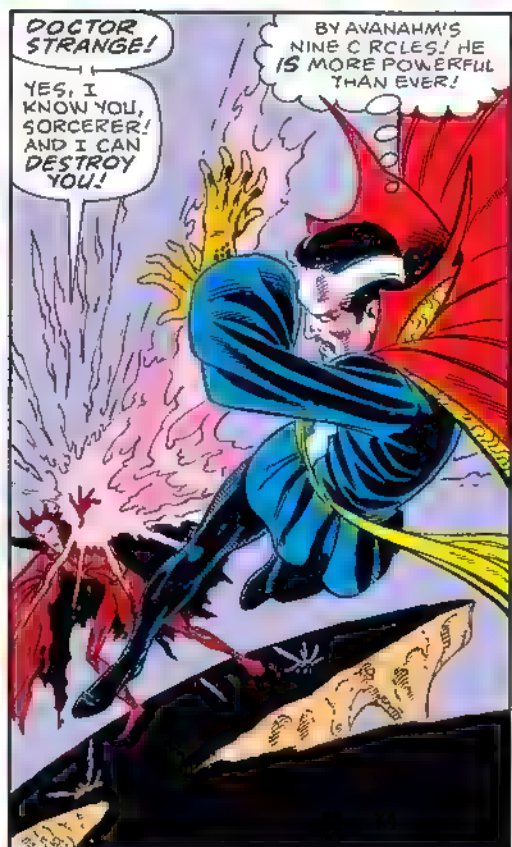
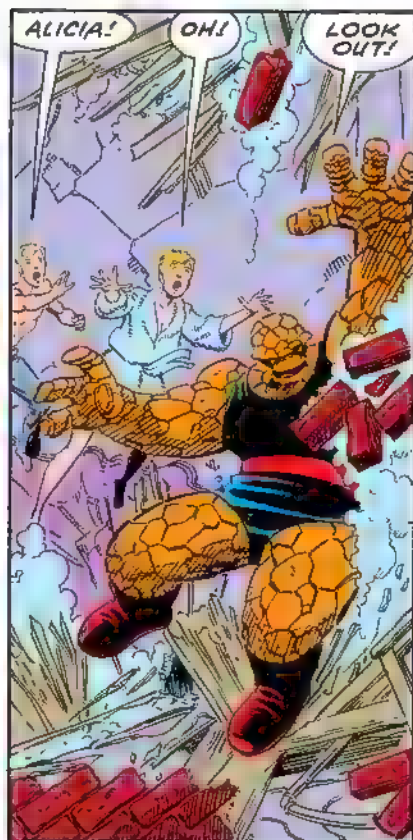
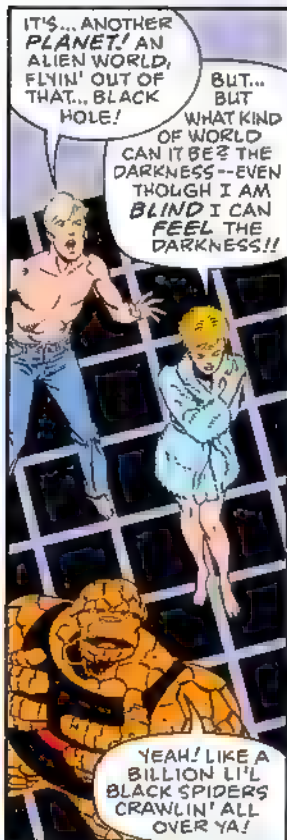
AND...YES! YES!! MEPHISTO GROWS STRONGER, EVER STRONGER!

AS EVIL GROWS UPON THE FACE OF THE EARTH, SO IS MEPHISTO ENRICHED!

SO IS HE MADE INVINCIBLE!!

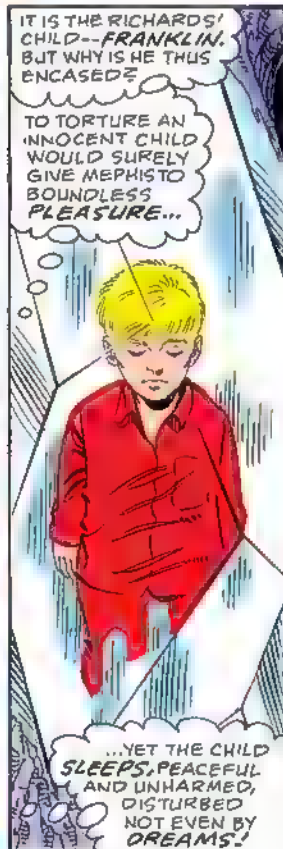
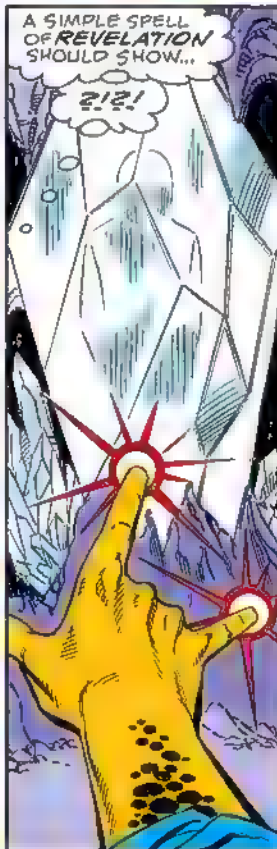


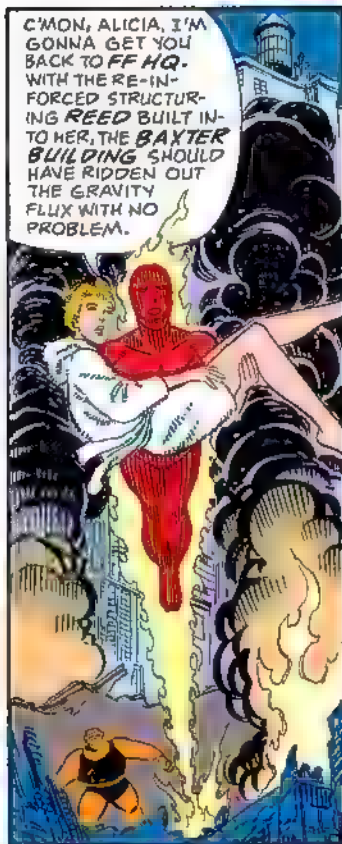
I THINK NOT, LORD OF HADES.





*BACK IN FANTASTICFOUR #234.





C'MON, ALICIA, I'M GONNA GET YOU BACK TO FF HQ. WITH THE RE-INFORCED STRUCTURING REED BUILT INTO HER, THE BAXTER BUILDING SHOULD HAVE RIDDEN OUT THE GRAVITY FLUX WITH NO PROBLEM.

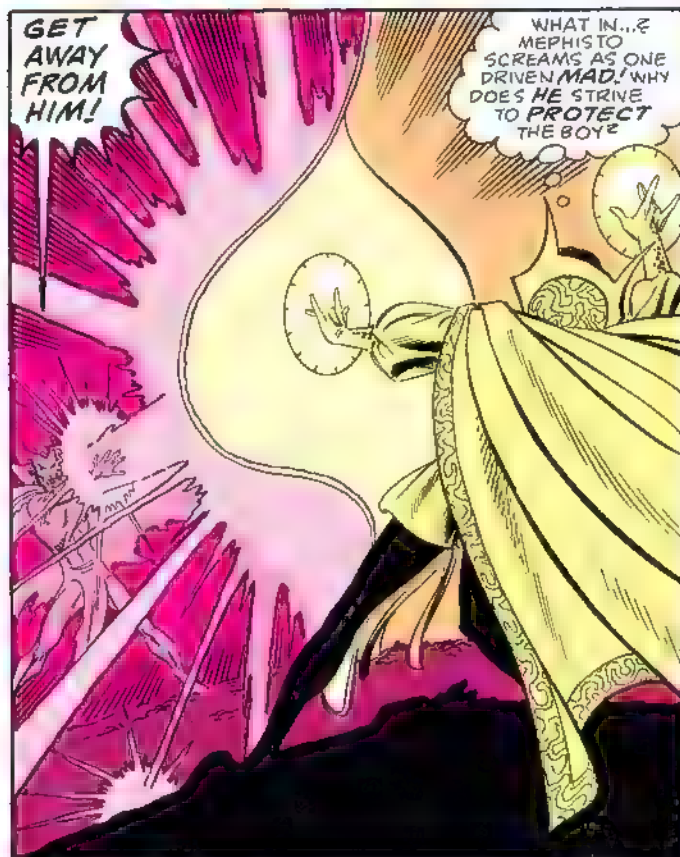


HMM. LOOKS AS IF THE DAMAGE ISN'T AS BAD AS WE FIRST THOUGHT. NEW YORK'S BUILT ON SOLID BEDROCK SO THERE ISN'T ANY OF THE GROUND SUBSIDANCE THAT'S THE MAJOR CAUSE OF DAMAGE IN 'QUAKES

MOST OF THE DAMAGE SEEMS TO BE FROM THE FACADES FALLING OFF SOME OF THE OLDER BUILDINGS.

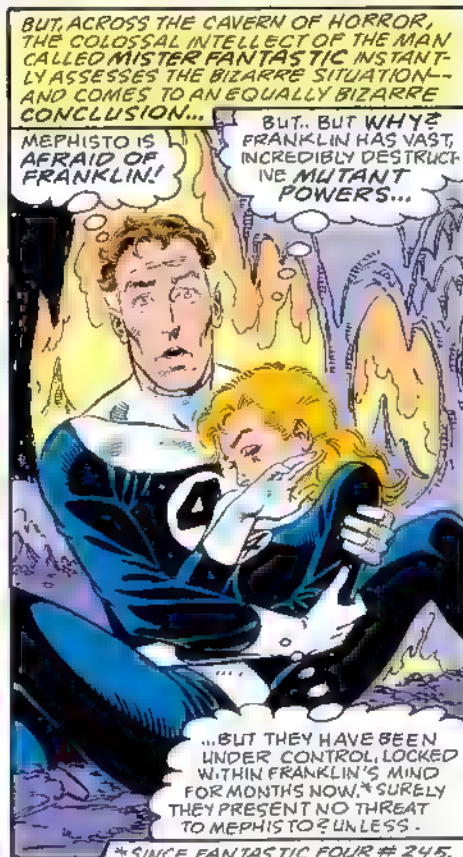


THAT, AND ABOUT A MILLION BROKEN WINDOWS. ONCE I DROP YOU OFF, I'LL FLY OVER THE CITY AND DO WHAT I CAN TO CONTROL THE FIRES



GET AWAY FROM HIM!

WHAT IN...? MEPHISTO SCREAMS AS ONE DRIVEN MAD! WHY DOES HE STRIVE TO PROTECT THE BOY?



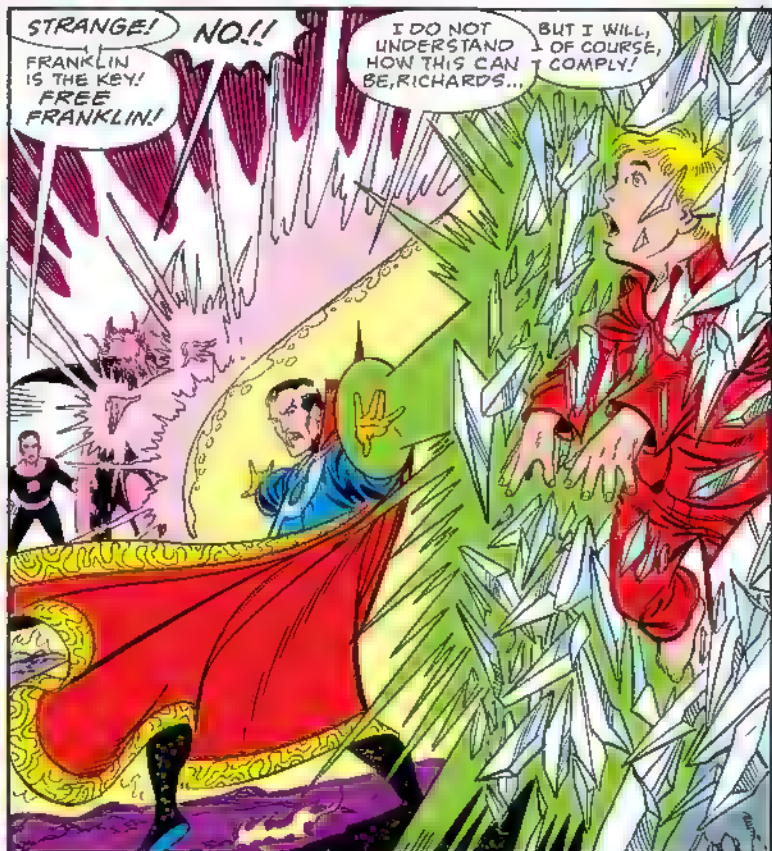
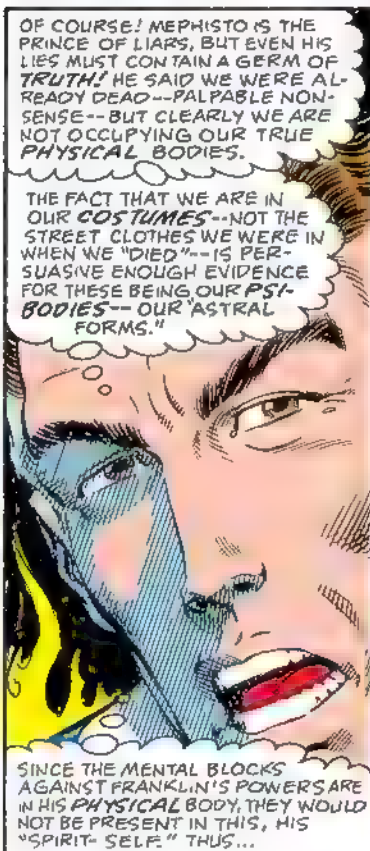
BUT, ACROSS THE CAVERN OF HORROR, THE COLOSSAL INTELLECT OF THE MAN CALLED MISTER FANTASTIC INSTANTLY ASSESSES THE BIZARRE SITUATION-- AND COMES TO AN EQUALLY BIZARRE CONCLUSION...

MEPHISTO IS AFRAID OF FRANKLIN!

BUT, BUT WHY? FRANKLIN HAS VAST, INCREDIBLY DESTRUCTIVE MUTANT POWERS...

...BUT THEY HAVE BEEN UNDER CONTROL, LOCKED WITHIN FRANKLIN'S MIND FOR MONTHS NOW. SURELY THEY PRESENT NO THREAT TO MEPHISTO? UNLESS.

* SINCE FANTASTIC FOUR # 245.



"MY DARLING?"
WAIT A MINUTE!
AM I MISSING
SOMETHING
HERE, OR...?

YOU ARE NOT MISSING
ANYTHING, **JENNIFER**.
JOHNNY AND I HAVE
HAD A SERIOUS RE-
LATIONSHIP DEVELOP-
ING FOR SEVERAL
MONTHS.

BUT... BUT
ALICIA, WHAT'S
GOING TO HAPPEN
WHEN THE
THING...?

IT HAS ALREADY HAP-
PENED, JEN. BEN RE-
TURNED THIS MORNING
BEFORE ALL THIS BEGAN.

HE... THEN... THEN IT'S
DID... OVER. MY TIME
WITH THE **FAN-
TASTIC FOUR** IS
DONE!

FUNNY, I'D
THOUGHT IT'D JUST
BE A FUN FEW
MONTHS, SUBBING
FOR THE THING, BUT
IT'S BECOME SOME-
THING **MORE** THAN
THAT.

SOMETHING
SPECIAL...

SOMETHING
IMPORTANT!

**MEAN-
WHILE...** WHADDA
MESS! I'M BEGINNIN'
TA FEEL LIKE I'M
A REAL **JONAH**,
BRING N' BAD LUCK
WHEREVER I GO

THAT "SECRET
WARS" PLANET
WUZ S'POSED TA
BE ALL PEACEABLE
AN' CALM, BUT I
TAPPED INTA MY
PSYCHE AN' GOT
ALL MESS'D UP.

AN' NOW I
HAVEN'T BIN HOME
MORE'N THREE
SECONDS AN' THE
WHOLE **EARTH**
GOES **BLOOEY!**

REED! HE
LOOKS SO
TINY, SO VUL-
NERABLE!
I... I'VE GOT
TO GET TO
HIM!

NO, SUE. **NO!** YOUR
POWERS AS THE
INVISIBLE GIRL
ARE NO USE AGAINST
THE KIND OF FORCES
THAT ARE BEING
UNLEASHED HERE.

"ONLY **FRANKLIN** CAN
SAVE US NOW. ONLY
FRANKLIN!"

WHERE...

...AM...

...I?

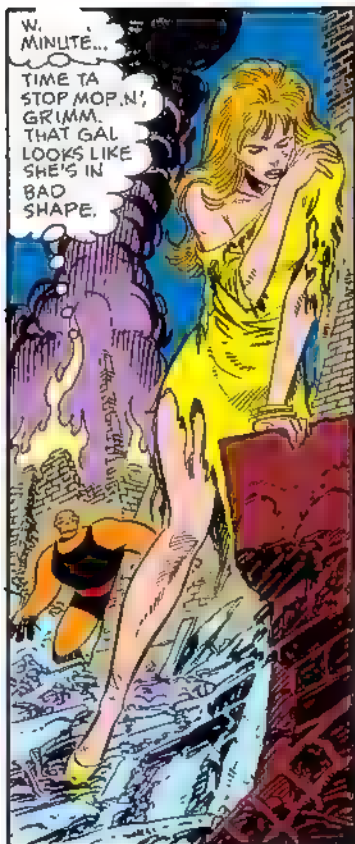
I... RE..
MEMBER...
BAD LADY
'TACKING
MOMMY AN'
DADDY... AN'
... **BIG RED
MAN**
BROKE OUR
HOUSE...

THE CHILD IS
DISORIENTED...
HELPLESS...

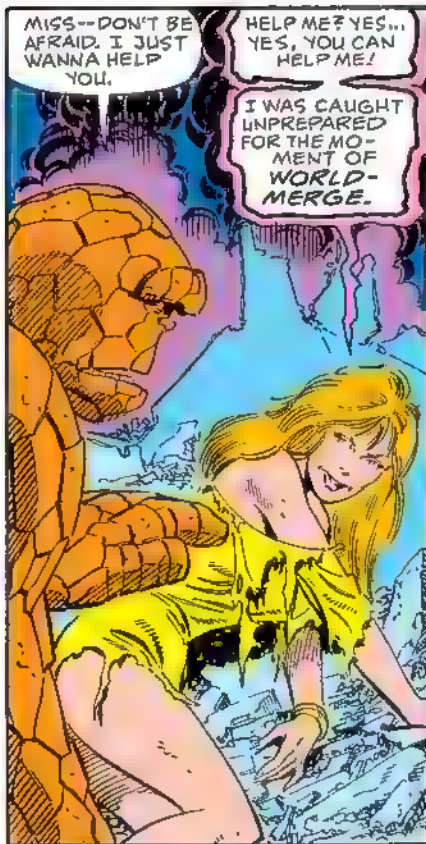
IT SEEMS YOUR
PLAN MUST
FAIL, REED
RICHARDS. WATCH,
THEN, AS YOUR
CHILD IS **TORN TO
SHREDS**...

...AND
DOES
NOT
DIE!!

.NO..



W.
MINUTE...
TIME TO
STOP MOP.N'
GRIMM.
THAT GAL
LOOKS LIKE
SHE'S IN
BAD
SHAPE.



MISS--DON'T BE
AFRAID. I JUST
WANNA HELP
YOU.

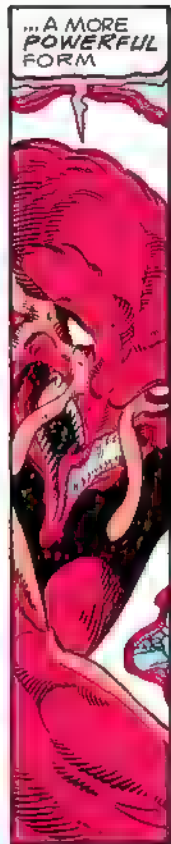
HELP ME? YES...
YES, YOU CAN
HELP ME!

I WAS CAUGHT
UNPREPARED
FOR THE MO-
MENT OF
WORLD-
MERGE.



THIS FRAIL
HUMAN FORM
IS BADLY
DAMAGED

IT'S TIME I
RELIN-
QUISHED
IT IN FAVOR
OF ANOTHER...



...A MORE
POWERFUL
FORM



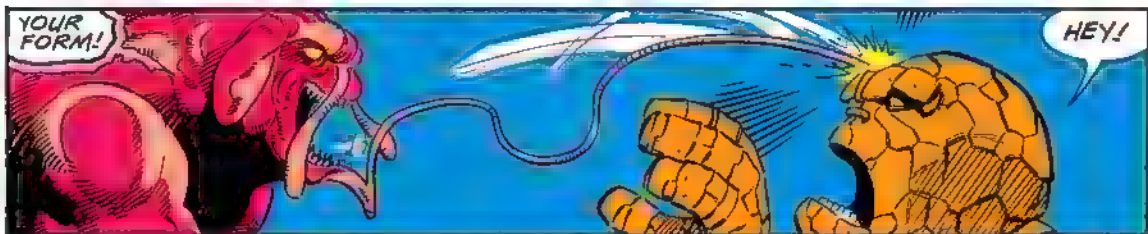
NO.



NO.



NO!!



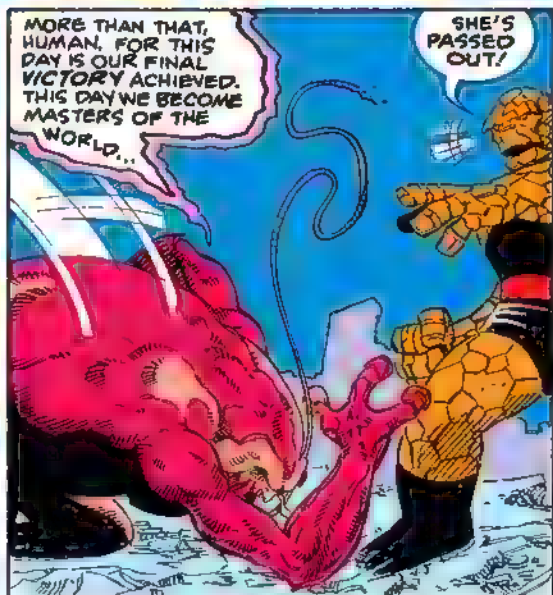
YOUR FORM!

HEY!



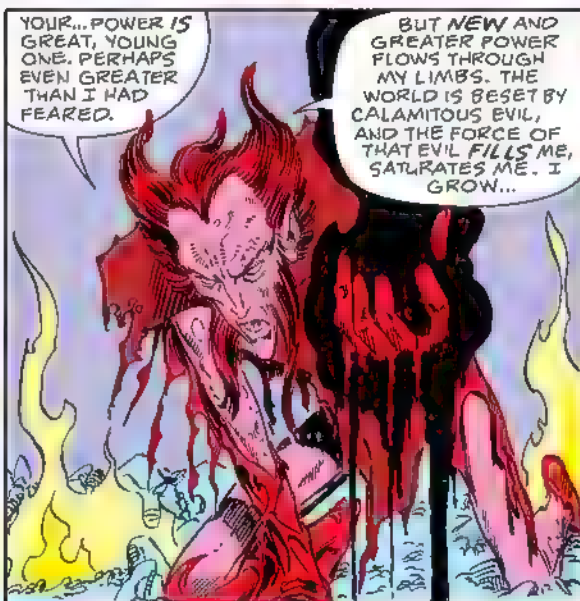
DO NOT STRUGGLE, HUMAN. IT WILL AVAIL YOU NAUGHT. YOU ARE, AT THIS MOMENT, AS ONE DEAD!

Y-YOU...YOU'RE ONE O' THEM CRUMMY DIRE WRAITHS!



MORE THAN THAT, HUMAN. FOR THIS DAY IS OUR FINAL VICTORY ACHIEVED. THIS DAY WE BECOME MASTERS OF THE WORLD...

SHE'S PASSED OUT!



YOUR...POWER IS GREAT, YOUNG ONE. PERHAPS EVEN GREATER THAN I HAD FEARED.

BUT NEW AND GREATER POWER FLOWS THROUGH MY LIMBS. THE WORLD IS BESET BY CALAMITOUS EVIL, AND THE FORCE OF THAT EVIL FILLS ME, SATURATES ME. I GROW...



I GROW...

WEAKER??

NO! NO! THE POWER DESERTS ME! THE EVIL IS...

...GONE...



AND NOW...

...BAD MAN...



WHAT
COULD
HAVE...?

WAIT!

THAT OTHER
PLANET! IT'S...
GONE!!

WHAT TH'HECK
HAPPENED?

THE ANSWER WILL NOT BE QUICK IN
COMING. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE
HOMELAND OF THE CREATURES
KNOWN AS DIRE WRAITHS WAS
ACCOMPLISHED BY A SMALL BAND
OF BRAVE MEN ON A SPACE-PLAT-
FORM HIGH ABOVE THE EARTH.*



*FULL DETAILS CAN BE FOUND IN ROM#65.

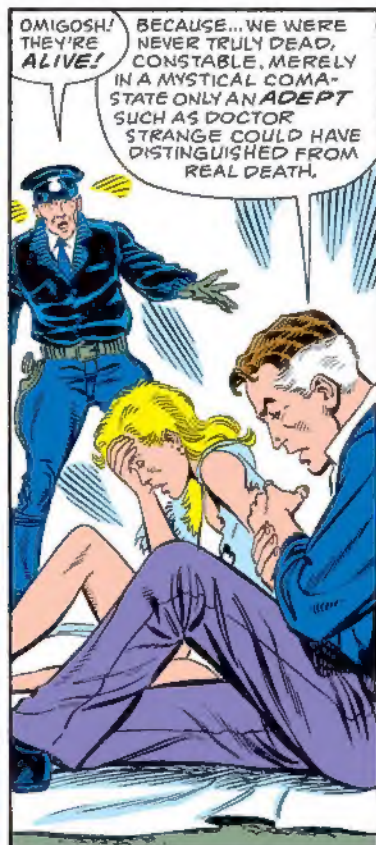
BUT FOR THE PEOPLE
OF EARTH, THE INJURED,
THE DYING, THE SUR-
VIVORS OF THIS AWFUL
DAY, THERE CAN BE NO
IMMEDIATE KNOWLEDGE
OF THIS.



ONLY A SUDDEN
SENSE OF IN-
EXPLICABLE
JOY THAT
PIERCES THE
BLACK HEART
OF PAIN AND
BRINGS, FOR
JUST A MOMENT,
A SWEET AND
WELCOME
PEACE.



...YOU'RE
GONE,
TOO!!!





SHE-HULK...YOU MUSTN'T SOUND SO SAD. JUST BECAUSE BEN HAS RETURNED, THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE CUT OFF.

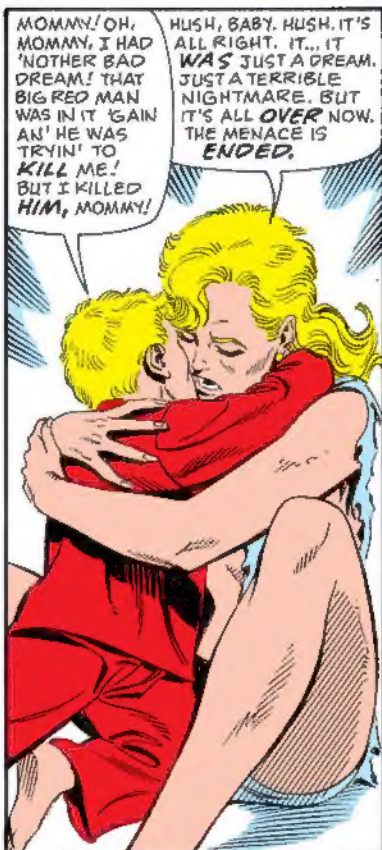
SURE, JEN. YOU'VE BEEN ONE OF US, FOUGHT AT OUR SIDE, STOOD WITH US IN TIME OF NEED.

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE WELCOME HERE. ALWAYS!



THANKS, JOHNNY. THANKS A LOT. YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MUCH THAT MEANS TO ME. I REALLY...

HOLD IT, BIG GREEN. YOU'RE GETTIN' A BIT AHEAD OF YOURSELF THERE.



MOMMY! OH, MOMMY, I HAD 'NOTHER BAD DREAM! THAT BIG RED MAN WAS IN IT 'GAIN AN' HE WAS TRYIN' TO KILL ME! BUT I KILLED HIM, MOMMY!

HUSH, BABY. HUSH. IT'S ALL RIGHT. IT... IT WAS JUST A DREAM. JUST A TERRIBLE NIGHTMARE. BUT IT'S ALL OVER NOW. THE MENACE IS ENDED.



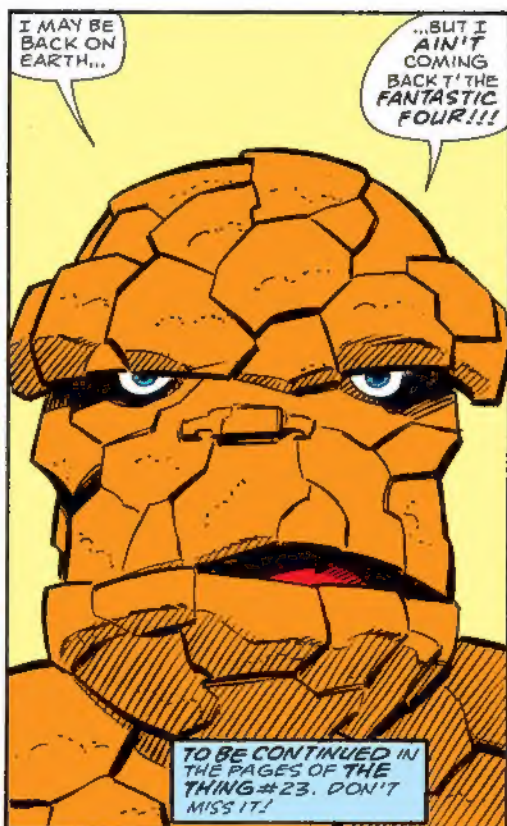
IS SUE RIGHT, STEPHENE IS IT...TRULY OVER?

PERHAPS. THE MENACE OF MEPHISTO HAS CERTAINLY BEEN EXPUNGED. HIS LIFE-ESSENCE HAS BEEN BANISHED FROM THIS AND ALL ADJACENT SPIRIT-PLANES.



BUT...MEPHISTO DID NOT **CREATE** THE EVIL IN THIS WORLD. RATHER, IT WAS THE EVIL THAT **CREATED** MEPHISTO. HE WAS BUT A SHADOW, A REFLECTION OF THE BLACKNESS THAT CROUCHES IN EVERY HUMAN SOUL.

MEPHISTO **HAS** BEEN DESTROYED AT LAST. BUT SO LONG AS EVIL REMAINS IN THE HEARTS OF MEN, I FEAR IT WILL NOT BE OVERLONG BEFORE HE IS **REBORN**.



THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN A **STAN LEE** PRESENTATION, BROUGHT TO YOU BY...

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